

The Council on Postsecondary Education is launching a statewide Adult Learner Initiative as part of its effort to double the number of bachelor's degree holders. Kentucky needs 791,000 bachelor's degree holders by 2020 to reach the projected national average in educational attainment. This means that the number of bachelor's degree holders needs to double over the next 13 years, and the adult college participation rate needs to increase from 3.6 percent to 4.5 percent to achieve the goals outlined in the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 (HB 1).

The target population for this initiative, which will be funded in part from a \$500,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education and matching state funds, is working-age adults who have not completed a postsecondary degree. There are several subgroups within this population, including: (1) adults who started but never completed a bachelor's degree, (2) adults with an associate's degree who want to complete a bachelor's degree, (3) high school graduates with no postsecondary experience, and (4) GED completers with no postsecondary experience.

While the ultimate goal of this initiative is to increase the number of Kentuckians with postsecondary degrees, its main short-term objectives are to: (1) create a comprehensive policy framework at both the state and institutional levels to support adult college attendance, (2) promote the importance of baccalaureate degrees among the working-age population through a marketing campaign and initiatives with employers, and (3) increase the responsiveness of postsecondary institutions to the unique needs of adult learners.

This multi-year initiative will begin with a statewide forum to be held February 4 and 5, 2008. This forum will feature national leaders with expertise in best practices in adult learning. Afterwards, policy work groups consisting of postsecondary institutional representatives, legislators, state government agency representatives, business and industry representatives, and Council members will work throughout 2008 to draft state- and institutional-level policy recommendations to make postsecondary education in the state more adult-friendly and encourage more adults to pursue degrees. A comprehensive set of state policy and funding recommendations will be available before the 2010 General Session of the Kentucky General Assembly.

As part of this initiative, public institutions will be asked to assess how adult-friendly their campuses are by administering the Adult Learning Focused Institution's Institutional Self-Assessment Survey on their campuses. Results of these assessments will lead to institutional-level policy changes to help institutions become more supportive of adult learners.